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Reading 1 Timothy 2:12 in its Context

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Part SIX: Gnostic Beliefs Related to Eve

goddess Artemis were both cited as the originator of all life. In part FIVE, we saw that Paul's exhortation not to '*authentein'* could have had the sense of "claim to be an originator." Part TWO indicated that origins were important to the Gnostics; we will now examine Gnostic thinking on origins, as it relates to *Eve*.

In Gnostic thought, female activity was often responsible for the creation of the material universe, and Eve was central in this regard. She was understood to be the mother from whom all living things came (in parallel to the Great Mother Goddess "Artemis" discussed back in part ONE). Eve was believed by the Gnostics to possess the ability to procreate without male assistance, as reflected in this Gnostic text: "Eve is the first virgin, who gave birth without a man. . . ." She was believed to have pre-existed Adam and gained a knowledge that she would later impart to him. In one account, she was the hermaphrodite from whose side man was formed. She was credited with the creation of Adam and the bestowal upon him of the gift of life. Gnostics also depicted Eve as mediator of the knowledge brought by the serpent; recall back in part THREE it was pointed out that in 1 Tim 2:5, Paul stresses there is only one mediator, Jesus, in what appears to be an attack against opponents who are claiming there are other mediators.

These distortions of the Genesis depictions of Adam and Eve come from documents dated later than the time period during which the letter of 1 Timothy was written. However, ancient writers attest that distorted Old Testament stories were already circulating during the 1st century AD, and some of them pertained to Adam and Eve. For example, Philo (who died in 45 AD) represented Eve as the one who brings knowledge to Adam. Further, in telling this account, Philo uses imagery frequently employed in Gnosticism.

With this as background, let us now take a look at 1 Tim 2:13-14, the two verses immediately following Paul's prohibition against teaching found in verse 12. Verses 13-14 read: "For Adam was first created, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being absolutely deceived, was in the transgression." Here, Paul recounts the details of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve, and does so in such a way as to present the *exact opposite* of the details of the Gnostic understanding of Adam and Eve. In fact, verses 13-14 appear to be a direct *refutation* of the Gnostic understanding. The Gnostics say, "Eve existed first and created Adam"; Paul says, "No, Adam was created first, and then Eve." The Gnostics say, "Eve supplied Adam with the true knowledge ('*gnosis'*)." Paul says, "No, Eve did not have the true knowledge; rather, she was the one who was deceived." Paul's words represent a perfect refutation of Gnostic thought on Adam and Eve.

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